

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4714

INFO AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINT, EI

SUBJ: ANALYSIS OF CHILDERS ELECTION VICTORY

BEGIN SUMMARY: FIANNA FAIL CANDIDATE ERSKINE CHILDERS WON MAY 30 IRISH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BY SURPRISING MARGIN OF FOUR PERCENT. CAMPAIGN, LABOR AND YOUTH ABSTENTIONISM, RELIGION, IRISH UNITY CONSIDERATIONS, COALITION RECORD, POLICIES AND OVERCONFIDENCE, AND INDEPENDENT VOTE ALL PLAYED ROLE IN RESULT. WHILE CHILDERS PRESIDENCY WILL HAVE NO LEGAL EFFECT ON GOI POLICY, IT IS A SETBACK FOR COALITION. END SUMMARY.

1. FINAL RESULTS OF MAY 30 IRISH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION GIVE CHILDERS 636,162 OR 52 PERCENT AND O' HIGGINS 587,577 OR 48 PERCENT OF VOTE. 62 PERCENT OF ELECTORATE VOTED, COMPARED WITH 64.7 IN 1966 AND 58 PERCENT IN 1959. BOTH FIANNA FAIL AND FINE GAEL NEWSPAPERS AGREE MAJORITY WAS "MASSIVE" IN IRISH TERMS.

2. FACTORS INVOLVED IN CHILDERS VICTORY AS FOLLOWS:  
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A) CAMPAIGN: O' HIGGINS ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY AND STARTED CAMPAIGNING TOO EARLY. FINE GAEL SLURS ON PRESIDENT DE VALERA AS INACTIVE INCUMBENT AND CHILDERS AS TOO OLD TO RUN RUBBED VOTERS THE WRONG WAY. CHILDERS MOUNTED EFFECTIVE, PEAKING CAMPAIGN, BUILDING ON ALREADY FAVORABLE IMAGE THROUGH EFFECTIVE USE OF TV AND INTENSIVE " WHISTLE- STOP" BUS SWING THROUGHOUT COUNTRY.

B) LABOR ABSTENTION: ALTHOUGH LABOR PARTY AND TRADE UNIONS ENDORSED O' HIGGINS, LABOR VOTE DID NOT COME OUT IN CITY AREAS, WHERE O' HIGGINS HAD TO GET VOTES TO COUNTERACT NORMAL FIANNA FAIL SUPPORT IN RURAL AREAS. LABOR ALSO OFFENDED THAT COALITION DID NOT DECIDE TO BRING FARMERS INTO INCOME TAX NET.

C) BUDGET: INCREASED TAXES CALLED FOR IN BUDGET TO HELP FINANCE COALITION' S SOCIAL WELFARE PACKAGE OFFENDED MIDDLE CLASS PORTION OF ELECTORATE. SOCIAL WELFARE PACKAGE WAS KNOWN WELL BEFORE CAMPAIGN AND CAME AS ANTI-CLIMAX. FARMERS CRITICIZED COALITION' S FAILURE FULLY IMPLEMENT PROMISE TO DISPOSE OF DEATH DUTIES.

D) YOUTH ABSTENTION: NEWLY ENFRANCHISED 18-21 YEAR OLDS DID NOT VOTE IN SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS APPARENTLY BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REGARD MAINLY CEREMONIAL, SYMBOLIC PRESIDENCY IMPORTANT. YOUTH HAD BEEN EXPECTED SUPPORT COALITION.

E) IRISH UNITY: CHILDERS AS LEADING PROTESTANT AND FIANNA FAIL POLITICIAN WON SUPPORT AS CANDIDATE WHO SYMBOLIZED DESIRE FOR IRISH UNIFICATION. INCIDENTALLY, CONSTITUENCY RESULTS INDICATE IRISH PROTESTANTS PROBABLY VOTED FOR HIM IN LARGE NUMBERS.

F) INDEPENDENT SUPPORT: CHILDERS CREDITED HIS VOTE LARGELY TO SUPPORT HE RECEIVED FROM NON- PARTY INDEPENDENTS. HIS INTEGRITY AND ABILITY, LONG OUTSTANDING CAREER, ESPECIALLY AS MINISTER FOR HEALTH, AND EXCEPTIONAL LUCIDITY IN CAMPAIGN WON ADMIRATION AND VOTES.

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G) COALITION COMPLACENCY: COALITION BELIEVED ITS VICTORY IN GENERAL ELECTIONS, INNOVATIVE 90 DAYS IN OFFICE, AND O' HIGGINS CLOSE RUN AGAINST DE VALERA IN 1966 ( HE LOST BY ONLY 10,000 VOTES) ASSURED RELATIVELY EASY VICTORY. THEY MAY NOT HAVE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT FACT THAT FIANNA FAIL IS LARGEST PARTY WITH BEST GRASS ROOTS ORGANIZATION, POSSIBILITY THAT COALITION WAS

PURSUIING REFORMS TOO FAST FOR CONSERVATIVE IRISH ELECTORATE ( EUDCATION MINISTER BURKE ACKNOWLEDGED THIS IN POST- ELECTION COMMENT) AND FACT THAT O' HIGGINS SUCCESS IN 1966 WAS PARTLY PROTEST AGAINST FIANNA FAIL' S LONG TENURE AND AGAINST ITS REFERENDUM ON ABOLISHING PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WHICH WAS DEFEATED SAME DAY AS 1966 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESULT: FIANNA FAIL AND EVEN ONE MEMBER OF FINE GAEIL CALL ELECTION DECISIVE SETBACK FOR COALITION, WHILE PM COSGRAVE SAID RESULT IN NO WAY AFFECTED COALITION MODE. COSGRAVE DISMISSED RESULT AS NOT INDICATIVE OF HOW COUNTRY WOULD VOTE IN PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTION ( AT TIME HE MADE STATEMENT, POLL APPEARED EXCEPTIONALLY LOW). NEVERTHELESS, O' HIGGINS CAMPAIGN WAS MOUNTED ON COALITION RECORD, AND WHETHER OR NOT PEOPLE VOTED ON ITS BASIS, IT MUST BE REGARDED AS SETBACK FOR COALITION. INCUMBENCY OF CHILDERS CANNOT LEGALLY AFFECT GOI POLICY, BUT IT WILL TAKE SOME WIND OUT OF COALITION SAILS.

4. NEXT STEPS: PRESIDENT DE VALERA STEPS DOWN JUNE 24, AND CHILDERS IS INAUGURATED JUNE 25. BY- ELECTION WILL BE HELD IN MONAGHAN. FIANNA FAIL MAY DECIDE TO CAPITALIZE ON PRESIDENTIAL VICTORY BY MOVING IT BEFORE DAIL SUMMER RECESS. SENATOR AND FORMER- FONMIN BRIAN LENIHAN HAS ALREADY SAID HE WILL RUN IF SLECTED BY FIANNA FAIL CONSTITUENCY NOMINATING CONVENTION. IF FIANNA FAIL WINS, DAILL WILL REMAIN AS BEFORE; IT COALITION SUCCEEDS, IT WILL INCREASE MAJORITY BY ONE SEAT. MOORE

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** willialc  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
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**Executive Order:** n/a  
**Errors:** n/a  
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**Original Classification:** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
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**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:**  
**Previous Classification:** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** willialc  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 07 AUG 2001  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <07-Aug-2001 by kellerpr>; APPROVED <29-Aug-2001 by willialc>  
**Review Markings:**

Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
30 JUN 2005

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** <DBA CORRECTED> wfs 980213  
**Subject:** ANALYSIS OF CHILDERS ELECTION VICTORY  
**TAGS:** PINT, EI  
**To:** BELFAST  
EC BRUSSELS  
EUR  
LONDON  
REYKJAVIK  
SECSTATE WASHDC  
**Type:** TE

**Markings:** Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005